

RESOURCES

NATURE, HISTORY AND HORTICULTURE IN FAIRFAX COUNTY

VOLUME 6, NO. 3 SUMMER 2006

Welcome Back Otter

By Lee Ann Shenefiel
Operations Manager for Lake Accotink

A few years ago at Lake Accotink, the team of naturalists could hardly believe their eyes. After decades of disappearance, there it was — a beautiful little river otter. Stewardship efforts to care for and improve the natural health of the county were paying off in a big way. River otters were coming back!

River otters, native to North America, have faced much hardship since Europeans first began exporting raw materials from North America. They were popular targets of fur trappers during the 18th and 19th centuries, which led to their initial decline. In the 20th century, the Potomac River and many local waterways became so toxic with DDT, runoff from pesticides, solvents and toxic metals, compounded by habitat destruction, that otters disappeared from our area.

Slowly, otter populations appear to be on the rebound here due to stewardship actions that improve the health of the Chesapeake Bay and great efforts to bring them back.

The native otter population is greatest on Maryland's Eastern shore. Otters have been taken from this region for repopulation efforts in other parts of the coast. The Pennsylvania River Otter Reintroduction Project, or PROP, has been releasing animals into the wild since 1982. The Chesapeake Bay Program has also been helpful in restoring the river otter population in the mid-Atlantic.

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LEARN MORE ABOUT LOCAL WILDLIFE.

Visit the Nature Pages at fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/resources/

Dear ResOURces:

I'm a 14-year-old resident of Fairfax County and in all that time I've never seen much more than a deer, groundhog, hawk, squirrel or your typical backyard and marsh area bird population near my home. It was therefore exceedingly alarming to me (as I am a nature lover and avid conservationist) to get my first-ever glimpse of a North American River Otter as road kill on US 1 at the turnoff for the Fairfax County Parkway. I am 100% certain it was an otter as it was large, sleek, brown and had a long narrow tail (therefore not a beaver and not a muskrat).

My whole family was upset by this, especially my father (the otter is his favorite animal). We would like to inquire:

- 1. What is being done to protect and provide suitable habitat for otters in Fairfax County?*
- 2. What parks can we visit to see them alive?*
- 3. Is there any chance that someone could locate any remaining otters in that area and move them somewhere safer?*
- 4. Can we do anything to help with river otter conservation?*

Thank you for your time and attention.

*Sincerely, Alison
Alexandria, Virginia*

Dear Alison,

The river otter is native to our region, although no longer abundant and they are very shy of humans. River otters are the largest local member
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PHOTO: Ron Niebrugge, National Park Service

SUMMER FUN

NATURE CENTERS AND HISTORIC SITES

BURKE LAKE PARK
7315 Ox Road, Fairfax Station
Call 703-323-6600

COLVIN RUN MILL
10017 Colvin Run Road, Great Falls
Call 703-759-2771

ELLANOR C. LAWRENCE PARK
5040 Walney Road, Chantilly
Call 703-631-0013

FRYING PAN PARK
2709 West Ox Road, Herndon
Call 703-437-9101

GREEN SPRING GARDENS
4603 Green Spring Rd., Alexandria
Call 703-642-5173

HIDDEN OAKS NATURE CENTER
7701 Royce Street, Annandale
Call 703-941-1065

HIDDEN POND NATURE CENTER
8511 Greeley Blvd., Springfield
Call 703-451-9588

HUNTLEY MEADOWS PARK
3701 Lockheed Blvd., Alexandria
Call 703-768-2525

LAKE ACCOTINK PARK
7500 Accotink Park Rd., Springfield
Call 703-569-3464

LAKE FAIRFAX PARK
1400 Lake Fairfax Drive, Reston
Call 703-471-5414

RIVERBEND PARK
8700 Potomac Hills Street
Great Falls
Call 703-759-9018

SULLY HISTORIC SITE
3601 Sully Road, Chantilly
Call 703-437-1794

Need directions or more information?
VISIT www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks

RESOURCES

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and Fairfax County libraries.

Visit **ResOURces** online at
www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/resources

♻️ **ResOURces** is printed on 100% recycled paper.

Saturday, June 24th Nature Scavenger Hunt

(Families), 2-3:30pm, Hidden Oaks Nature Center, 703-941-1065. Enjoy deciphering clues with your family as you explore the woods, ponds and streams around Hidden Oaks in Annandale District Park with one of three scavenger hunts. Choose the level of difficulty right for your family and friends and enjoy an afternoon outdoors. Reservations and advanced payment required. \$7/family.

Friday, June 30th Cafe Cattails at Huntley Meadows Park Celebrate Jamestown

Café Cattails is Huntley Meadows Park's very own coffeehouse. Enjoy a relaxing evening applauding our community's talents. The theme for this event is the commemoration of the settlement of Jamestown in 1607, with music, poetry, and readings inspired by that time period. There will be coffee, tea, lemonade, cookies, and brownies available for a small contribution. 7-9:30pm.

If you plan to perform, please make a reservation by calling 703-768-2525; if you simply want to enjoy the evening's performances, just show up!

Friday, August 4th Water Festival

(5-10 yrs.), 12:30-4pm, Hidden Oaks Nature Center, 703-941-1065. Come for part or all of this adult/child afternoon celebration of water. It's the key to life and, in the summer, often the key to fun! Explore a discovery room of wet and wild self-guided learning stations, games and activities. At 2pm, naturalists lead a hike to the creek for water tests and critter searches. At 3:30pm, slip into your bathing suit and join our water limbo contest plus other wet and wild outdoor activities. Sponsored by the Friends of Hidden Oaks Nature Center. Reservations and advanced payment required. \$6/child.



Swing dancers at WWII Living History Day.

Saturday, July 8th Sully World War II Day

Experience WWII from the home front to the front lines as Sully Historic Site hosts **WWII Living History Day on Saturday, July 8, from 10am-4pm**. Converse with members of the military from the U.S., England, Germany, and more as they talk about their daily experiences in the war. Visit both Allied and Axis camps to see equipment, vehicles, and weapons used in the war. Talk with women about their various roles, and find out how the civilians were contributing to the war effort. Take a tour of the main house and learn how residents of Northern Virginia were affected by WWII. Cost: \$6/adult, \$4/senior & child.



JAMESTOWN EVENTS!

VISIT www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/jamestown2007 OR see the Events and History section of *ParkTakes*



EQUAL ACCESS/SPECIAL ACCOMMODATIONS

The Fairfax County Park Authority is committed to equal access in all programs and services. Special accommodations will be provided upon request. Please call the ADA/Access coordinator at 703-324-8563, at least 10 working days in advance of the date services are needed.

ADA/Access Coordinator 703-324-8563 • TTY 703-803-3354 • www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/ada.htm

The New Observatory Park at The Turner Farm

By Nancy Russo, Fairfax County Park Foundation

The Fairfax County Park Foundation, in partnership with a group of local scientists, the Analemma Society, is raising funds to open Observatory Park at The Turner Farm in Great Falls. The observatory will provide much-needed space for aspiring young scientists. Students will experience first-hand the wonders of the universe.

The observatory is located at a former Cold War Nike missile site, which is now The Turner Farm in Great Falls, a Fairfax County park. A light pollution study by the Northern Virginia Astronomy Club found that The Turner Farm sits in the darkest nighttime spot within thirty miles of Washington. This location makes it ideal for exploring the moon, planets, star clusters, planetary nebulae and distant galaxies. The observatory's telescopes will offer amazing views of the brighter deep-sky objects with computer-aided precision tracking, guiding and image capture.

The new Observatory Park at The Turner Farm will be the only place in our area open to the public for weekly night-time viewing. The more than 220,000 school children in our area have very limited choices for visiting an observatory and most families cannot afford telescope equipment. Most observatories in our area are reserved for federal government and university use, open for public evenings only once or twice per month. Nevertheless, field astronomy is a great way to build interest and aptitude in physics, math, earth sciences and computers. You can help us inspire future space explorers.

The Turner Farm is located at 925 Springvale Road in Great Falls, Virginia. To learn more about Analemma Society programs, visit www.analemma.org



Observatory at The Turner Farm in Great Falls.

Inspire our future scientists to learn about earth's atmosphere and beyond by helping Observatory Park become a reality.

To donate online visit, www.fxparcs.org

To donate by mail, send your check made payable to The Fairfax County Park Foundation (write "Observatory" on the memo line), to:

Fairfax County Park Foundation
12055 Government Center Parkway, Suite 404
Fairfax, VA 22035

QUESTIONS? Call 703-324-8581 or email Robert.Brennan@fairfaxcounty.gov.

The Fairfax County Park Foundation is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization and all contributions to the Foundation are tax deductible to the fullest extent allowed by law.

SCIENCE AND THE NIGHT SKIES

The Great Falls' Analemma Society is offering a week-long science program from July 10 to 14 at Herndon High School. Participants at this hands-on, interactive week of science, titled Exploring Your Universe, will learn to enjoy the natural beauty of the night and daytime skies. They will discover the many secrets of the stars and the underlying science of astronomy. During a fun-filled week of observing, measuring, and experimenting, participants will use a planetarium, telescopes, sky charts, computers and sundials to explore the universe and observe the sun and its shadows. There will be one daytime and two optional evening visits to Observatory Park at The Turner Farm (parents welcome) that will allow everyone to practice their new observation skills. Bring snacks and lunch daily.

Ages 12-16, maximum 20 participants. \$175. Send registration check with student's name and age (please include your phone number and email address) before June 30th to:

Analemma Society
PO Box 196, Great Falls, Virginia 22066

For more information, email mary.blessing@fcps.edu. Notice will be sent if program fills up. Otherwise, plan to come to Herndon High School planetarium by 9am on July 10th.

BUFF UP THAT BUFFER



Children enjoy a day outdoors being good stewards and helping to restore a riparian buffer.

You may have noticed some unusual “tree things” in our parks lately; things that look like plastic tubes, birthday candles or green columns. They are tools the Park Authority and the Department of Public Works and Environmental Services use for tree and stream bank protection. Over the past year, Park Authority partner, Earth Sangha, has been supervising a project of enormous value to all of us in Fairfax County — the planting of 5000 trees and shrubs along several miles of streams in order to revitalize eroding, unhealthy stream banks. What they accomplished is called restoring a **riparian buffer**. They’ve worked in over 20 parks throughout the county. And the great thing? The team consisted of community volunteers.

What is a riparian buffer?

A riparian buffer is land next to a stream or river that is vegetated, usually with trees and shrubs, that serves as a protective filter for streams. A riparian buffer protects water quality against pollutants (filtering out harmful nutrients and sediment), enhances wildlife habitat, and helps stabilize stream banks from washing away. Riparian buffers can be 300 feet wide or 30 feet wide; it depends on the stream and the land around the stream.

Buff Up the Buffer

If your business volunteer team, civic group or scouts would like to help with riparian buffer restoration, call 703-324-8750, TTY 711 or visit fairfaxcounty.gov/dpwes/stormwater/riparianbuffer/. To learn more about Earth Sangha, visit earthsangha.org or call 703-764-4830.

What are the benefits of riparian buffers?

Buffers provide many benefits to the community by protecting the land and streams. They:

- 🌿 Reduce flooding by slowing down the rain and snowmelt (stormwater runoff) that travel over the land, roads, sidewalks, and highways to streams.
- 🌿 Protect streams and aquatic life by trapping debris that would otherwise reach streams and stress aquatic life.
- 🌿 Prevent erosion of stream banks by holding soil in place.
- 🌿 Improve water quality by enhancing the filtration of pesticides, nutrients, pathogens, and sediment.
- 🌿 Support aquatic life and biodiversity by providing a source of food and shade to reduce water temperature.
- 🌿 Support a diverse array of wildlife including birds, otter and fox.
- 🌿 Provide recreation and aesthetics for residents.

Scientists have shown that riparian buffers also improve the area around the stream. Parks that include riparian buffers are healthier and have more wildlife than parks without riparian buffers.

What is riparian buffer restoration?

Riparian buffer restoration is the process of restoring natural function to the land. Our current project restores riparian buffers by planting native plants and trees on the land next to streams and rivers. Riparian buffer restoration is a complex process which draws on a huge toolbox from engineering and biology that includes invasive plant removal, native plantings, stream realignment, the selected use of stone or biologs, and much more.

Why do we need to do riparian buffer restoration in Fairfax County?

In many cases, the riparian buffers that exist contain non-native plants that don’t provide the same benefits of native plant species. In other cases, trees and shrubs no longer exist, exposing the stream to many threats. Restoring riparian buffers is an integral component for maintaining the high quality of life in Fairfax County. Water quality, stream bank stability, habitat, and the overall quality of our streams all depend on high quality riparian buffers.

Reprinted with modification from the website of the Fairfax County Department of Public Works and Environmental Services (fairfaxcounty.gov/dpwes).

The Path to Becoming a Resource Management Division Volunteer

By Erin Chernisky, Volunteer Coordinator

Along the way you are sure to meet interesting people, enjoy your parks, and discover new opportunities!

★ START

- Think about your interests — we know your free time is valuable, so how would you like to spend it? Digging in a garden? Teaching people about Fairfax County's rich history? Driving a tractor? Helping children explore the natural world? Cataloging archaeological treasures?
- Think about what your talents are. Are you a seasoned bird watcher? Are you great with kids? Is your thumb green? Do you have a knack for fixing things? Are you a history buff?
- Get out and visit a park! Go for a hike, attend a program, talk to the staff and find out what current volunteer opportunities they have. Ask yourself; is this a place I'd like to support?
- What does your schedule look like? Are you free weekdays or weekends? How often would you like to volunteer — once a week, twice a month, only at special events?
- Found something that matches your interests and availability? Great! Now it's time to apply. Get an application from the park or apply on-line at fairfaxcounty.gov/parks.
- Check your messages; the park's Volunteer Coordinator will be contacting you to set up an interview.



“Volunteering at our county nature centers and historic sites is the perfect antidote to the nightly news and the frenetic pace of life.”

— HARRY GLASGOW, long-time park volunteer and member of the Park Authority Board

If you love being outdoors, gardening, storytelling, arts and crafts, history, wildlife, archaeology, working with people and being creative, then become a park volunteer. Join our dynamic volunteer staff today by visiting www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks or calling 703-324-8750.



Riverbend Volunteers

- Training time! Shadowing other volunteers, reading up on a specific topic, or attending a formal development session will move you along the volunteer path.
- **Congratulations and welcome to the RMD staff! A new journey is beginning for you...**

★ FINISH

Love to loll, stroll, look and listen? Then Hidden Pond Nature Center calls out to you.

Ten Great Reasons to Visit Hidden Pond

By Jim Pomeroy, Site Manager

Tucked away in Springfield, Hidden Pond is a neighborhood haven filled with wondrous things. Hidden Pond, at 25 acres, lies adjacent to the much larger Pohick Stream Valley Park which boasts over 700 acres. A new 2000-foot trail and bridge has connected the two parks, so that many more neighbors and guests can visit the Hidden Pond Nature Center as well as the pond, streams, wetlands, woods and other quiet places that these preserves have to offer.



1. Pohick Creek

Beginning at George Mason University in Fairfax, the Pohick Creek winds its way to sea level as it empties into the Occoquan. Pohick means hickory in the American Indian Dogue language, and the creek that bears that name winds through oak and hickory forest in some of the prettiest parkland of the county. Hidden Pond Park is adjacent to the Pohick Stream Valley Park and miles of trails are available for hiking and enjoying woods and streams.



2. Scenic Overlooks

The Pohick traverses the fall line, which marks the transition from the piedmont

to the coastal plain. Rugged terrain is often associated with the fall line, offering scenic overlooks where centuries ago Native Americans hunted, on the lookout for passing wildlife.

3. Woodpeckers

The woods surrounding Hidden Pond feature many old trees that are attractive to woodpeckers. The woodpeckers excavate nesting cavities that in turn become nesting sites for many other birds such as titmice, wrens, chickadees, owls, nuthatches, yellow warblers and bluebirds. Flickers, pileated, hairy, downy, and red-bellied woodpeckers are all usually seen during a leisurely walk.



4. The Pond

Water and wildlife go together and the park's pond is no exception. From its largest residents — the snapping turtles, to its smallest such as the hydra, daphnia, copepods, and volvox, the pond serves as our most important teaching resource. It's also great for relaxing, watching wildlife, or wetting your fishing line.

5. Barred Owls and Red-Shouldered Hawks

The Pohick stream valley is the kind of habitat favored by both the barred owl and the red-shouldered hawk. Both birds favor woodlands with streams or swamps. The shrill cry of the hawk, described as a two syllable scream "kee-er" (often dubbed into movies when a wilderness scene is depicted), draws your attention upward where it will be seen most days. The hooting of the barred owl, who seems to be saying "who cooks for you, who cooks for you all" can often be heard at sunset.

6. The Nature Center

Families, groups, children, anyone curious about their natural world, love the Nature Center. Exhibits, live displays, programs and events make the center a welcome destination for anyone suffering from nature deprivation. Changing exhibits featuring nature's current events — toad eggs hatching, moths pupating, flowers blooming, and sleeping snakes turn many of our visitors into regulars. Afterwards, the children can enjoy the playground.



7. Clara's Spring Wildflowers

For more than two decades naturalist Clara Ailes has chronicled the arrival of spring wildflowers in the Pohick stream valley. Her list which now stands at 86, gives blooming time and habitat for the flowers that grace our trails. So, on those days when winter seems to be lasting forever, hit the trails to discover the signs that spring is really here. Visit Clara's list online at fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/hiddenpond/springflowers.htm.

Directions: Hidden Pond may be reached by taking Route 95 south from Beltway Exit 57A to west on Old Keene Mill Road. Cross Rolling Road and turn left at the next light onto Greeley Boulevard and follow three blocks to the park entrance at 8511 Greeley Boulevard the end of the street.

Hours: Hidden Pond is open from 9am to 5pm daily. Closed Tuesdays. Call ahead for Holiday hours. Admission is FREE.

To learn more or to sign up for programs, see **ParkTakes**, visit www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/hiddenpond/, or call 703-451-9588.

Join *Friends of Hidden Pond*, a caring group of local businesses and citizens who love this beautiful park. For more information, email fohpnc@yahoo.com, or call 703-451-9588.

8. Scuds, Squishies and Swamp Things

When you visit Hidden Pond, treat yourself to a net from the Nature Center so you can explore the streams and learn about critters such as scuds, another name for fresh-water shrimp or *Gammarus fasciatus*. These small crustacea, up to 5/8 inch, are near the bottom of the food chain, working hard to convert plant material and small animals into food for larger animals. Other wetland animals include water sow bugs, predacious diving beetles and water striders, among others, all lurking in wet, inviting places.

9. Incredible Volunteers and Staff

Our cheerful, friendly staff, which includes nearly 50 energetic teen-age volunteers, is eager to serve. Whether conducting trail walks, aquatic studies, school programs, or other special events, or answering questions at the Nature Center, they exhibit a love of nature that is infectious. Challenge them with a question; if they don't know the answer, they will look it up with you in a book from our extensive reference library.

HIDDEN POND LOVES THEIR VOLUNTEERS

Last year, the Immanuel Christian Day School, of Springfield, planted 100 redbud tree saplings in the disturbed areas. In just a few years, the springtime show should be spectacular.

10. Loafing

Yes, loafing is encouraged here. Even loitering! Relax, take a walk, have a picnic, take a picture. If you must, go ahead and power-walk. But if you slow down, or better yet, stop, you will probably find that nature will come to you.



Don't Confuse HIDDEN POND with HIDDEN OAKS

Although they both are Fairfax County Nature Centers, they are two different places in two different areas. HIDDEN OAKS (703-941-1065) is just inside the beltway north of the Little River Turnpike in Annandale, and HIDDEN POND (703-451-9588) is outside the beltway in Springfield, south of Keene Mill Road.

Historic Overlay Districts Protect Historic Sites

Preserving our historic and cultural heritage provides big benefits for our community. It builds community pride, reduces crime, fosters tourism and industry and helps to bring the best businesses and talent to our area. A big step towards best practice in preservation is the county's new, proactive **Cultural Resource Management Plan**, which provides much-needed guidance and vision for the vast task of preserving Fairfax County's remarkable heritage. The Cultural Resource Management Plan for Fairfax County is one of the few of its kind in the nation, displaying trend-setting leadership by the Park Authority in heritage preservation.

One component of the Cultural Resource Management Plan defines **Historic Overlay Districts**. So what exactly is a Historic Overlay District?

Linda Blank, historic preservation planner in the County's Department of Planning & Zoning, explains, *"Historic Overlay districts are established to help protect historic properties from visual or direct effects, which includes discouraging the construction of incompatible large scale development that would negatively affect cultural resources. An extreme example would be a proposal to construct a 100 ft. neon pink doughnut next to an American Revolution cemetery!"*

Construction within a Historic Overlay District must be reviewed by the Fairfax County Architectural Review Board. The Board reviews projects proposed for the Historic Overlay Districts and acts in either an advisory capacity or a decision-making capacity depending on the project.

Liz Crowell, manager for the Cultural Resource Management and Protection Section of the Park Authority gives another reason why Historic Overlay Districts are so important: *"The preservation of historic sites improves the quality of life in an area. Historic Overlay Districts protect and enhance historic sites for site visitors and future generations."*

Any citizen, neighborhood organization, or county agency may propose establishing a district, which may consist of a single property or group of related properties. First, the Board of Supervisors must initiate a special study. Next, recommendations in the form of a research and planning report are prepared by professional staff of the Department of Planning and Zoning. The report is reviewed by the Fairfax County History Commission and Architectural Review Board, then forwarded to the Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors for public hearings and final action.

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HUNTER HOUSE *From Residence to Historic Rental Property*



With its picturesque formal lawn and stately trees, Hunter House continues to charm anyone looking for a site for a wedding, corporate seminar, company picnic or other celebration. Nestled in the lush green setting of Vienna's Nottoway Park, this turn-of-the-century federal-style farmhouse offers many amenities, spacious grounds and a quaint setting for groups from 10 to 200 people.

Hunter House bustles with activity during the summer. Not only does it provide an elegant setting for a tented garden party, but it is the location of many lively company picnics and family reunions. There is plenty of open space for an impromptu game of softball, and with tennis, volleyball and basketball courts nearby, the park offers a variety of activities for all. Many companies will rent a moon bounce or arrange for pony rides for the children. Guests who would rather enjoy a lazy summer afternoon can sip lemonade under one of the many oak trees, and the air-conditioned house can provide respite on a blistering hot day.

HUNTER HOUSE can be rented 364 days a year for social and corporate functions. For an appointment to see Hunter House or any of the seven other sites operated by Historic Properties Rental Services, visit www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/weddings.htm or call 703-938-8835.

100 Years+ of Virginia Life

This beautiful farmhouse has seen many changes in ownership, form and use over the years. The original house, built by Scots immigrant John C. Hunter in 1890, was a typical turn-of-the-century frame farm house. From 1921 to 1940, the William Davidson family lived in the house and, after Prohibition, operated a winery on the property — the first in Northern Virginia — producing a popular wine called Virginia Maid. New owners extensively renovated Hunter House in the 1940s. It was purchased by the Fairfax County Park Authority in 1972 and added to the Fairfax County Inventory of Historic Sites.

*"The preservation of historic sites improves the quality of life in an area.
Historic Overlay Districts protect and enhance historic sites for site visitors and future generations."*
— LIZ CROWELL, Cultural Resources Manager

HISTORIC OVERLAY DISTRICTS IN FAIRFAX COUNTY

BULL RUN STONE BRIDGE

Located on the grounds of Manassas National Battlefield Park, the stone arch bridge over Bull Run was a strategic crossing point during the two major Civil War battles fought nearby. Established 1972.

CENTREVILLE

This crossroads village developed in the late 18th century and was occupied by both Union and Confederate troops during the Civil War. Established 1986.

COLVIN RUN MILL

The mill, built in the 1820s, and surrounding buildings were an active part of the agricultural economy of Fairfax County throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries. Colvin Run Mill is a Park Authority property. Established 1972.

DRANESVILLE TAVERN

The tavern, built circa 1823, was a popular stopping place for those traveling the busy Leesburg and Georgetown Pikes during the 19th and 20th centuries until its closing in 1968. The tavern served both Union and Confederate armies during the war. Dranesville Tavern is a Park Authority property. Established 1972.

HUNTLEY HOUSE

The house, completed circa 1826, was the summer home of Thomson F. Mason, grandson of George Mason. Huntley is a Park Authority property. Established 1976.

LAKE ANNE VILLAGE CENTER

This visionary and award-winning cluster of residential and commercial structures was the heart of the Reston community when constructed in the mid-1960s. Established 1983.

LANGLEY FORK

This crossroads village includes residential, school, and church structures dating from the early 19th century. Established 1980.



Mt. Air Historic Site

MOUNT AIR

The main house, built about 1830, was lost to fire in 1992, but the house cellar, outbuildings and landscaped grounds remain. Mount Air is a Park Authority property. Established 1984.

POHICK CHURCH

The building was constructed between 1762 and 1772, with the first use of the building in the latter year. Both George Mason and George Washington had pews and attended services at Pohick Church. Established 1970.

ROBEY'S MILL

The house and mill were built in the mid-19th century. The mill served local farmers until 1906. Established 1980.

ST. MARY'S CHURCH

The first Roman Catholic church in Fairfax County was built in 1858. It was used by Clara Barton as a hospital after the Civil War battles of Second Manassas and Chantilly. The district includes portions of the 19th century railroad community of Fairfax Station. Established 1972.

SULLY HISTORIC SITE

The plantation house was built in 1794 for Richard Bland Lee who was the first U.S. congressman from Northern Virginia. He was also the uncle of Robert E. Lee. Established 1970.

WOODLAWN PLANTATION AND THE POPE/LEIGHY HOUSE

Woodlawn was built in 1805 on land owned by George Washington. The property was given by Washington as a wedding gift to his nephew Lawrence Lewis. The district also includes the Woodlawn Friends Meeting House of about 1853, the Washington Grist Mill reconstructed in 1932, and the Pope/Leighy house designed in 1942 by Frank Lloyd Wright and moved to the site in 1964. Established 1971.

Otters are extremely energetic creatures well adapted to aquatic life. Although they often appear playful, they are formidable predators. Its body is streamlined like a torpedo for quick underwater movement, and can swim both forwards and backwards. The otter's tail works like a rudder and they have webbed feet for paddling. They can remain submerged for several minutes, travel up to a quarter of a mile underwater, and dive up to 55 feet. Their eyes are close together and high set on their head so they can observe their surroundings while treading water. Historically, many fishermen have had ill feelings towards river otters because of the belief that otters deplete the local fishing and trout base. However, otters do exactly the opposite for the fish population. They feed mostly on slow-moving fish such as suckers and chubs. Additionally they remove some of the more competitive fish from the water like bluegill and catfish, leaving the trout more readily available for the anglers.

Otters communicate with each other by whistling and shrill chatter calls during mating season. Mating season begins in February as soon as the previous group of young has left the nest. The male generally mates with many females whose territories overlap with his territory. Males leave the nest when the young are first born and return after three or four months to help raise the young.

The river otter usually has dark brown fur, with a paler whitish underbelly, and grayish or silver throat. The white facial whiskers and its acute sense of smell allow it to sense prey movements. In groups, or alone, the river otter appears to be a very playful animal. They can often be spotted sliding down mud banks or ice slides into lakes and ponds. These slides are one of the most common pieces of evidence of otter activity.

However, other signs exist such as:

- ✧ Rolling places — flattened vegetation littered with their droppings
- ✧ Haul-outs — trails leading out of the water with droppings and shellfish
- ✧ Scat — otter excrement, often containing bones from their diet
- ✧ Trails — about 8 inches wide with heel pad and claw marks

River otters will be active during the day if they are left undisturbed by human activity.

CHILDREN CAN LEARN ABOUT OTTERS AT HIDDEN OAKS NATURE CENTER

OTTER-LY WONDERFUL.

Friday, July 28th, 1-2pm, ages 4-8. Hidden Oaks Nature Center, 703-941-1065. Discover the frolicking fun, lifestyle of our indigenous river otters and learn how they differ from sea otters. Enjoy activities, stories and make a craft. Reservations and advanced payment required per participant. \$4

Simple Stewardship Actions That Help Otters and Other Wildlife

There are many simple, easy actions that we can do as individuals to improve the health of our waterways, which in turn helps wildlife. Every little bit makes a difference.

Inside Your Home

- ✧ Use water wisely. Run the dishwasher when it is full and install a water-saving showerhead. Take showers instead of baths.
- ✧ Use biodegradable (environment-friendly) household products.
- ✧ Never pour paints and solvents down the drain.

Out in the Yard

- ✧ Use plants, trees, and grass that will help prevent soil erosion and neutralize harmful substances. Use fertilizer sparingly and water lawns and gardens during the morning and evening hours.
- ✧ Do not apply pesticides if rain is forecasted.
- ✧ Divert drain spouts away from concrete onto grass and use wood, bricks, or interlocking stones for patios and walkways. Concrete does not absorb rainfall and creates harmful runoff of oil, fertilizers, and soil, into storm drains, which eventually run into streams and lakes.
- ✧ Wash your car on the grass so detergents are absorbed. Whenever possible recycle harmful car products at a local automotive center. Never pour used motor oil down a storm drain.



Sunset Cruise at Lake Accotink Park.

A Walk on the Cross County Trail is a Walk through Fairfax County's Heritage

STREAMS

As the trail crosses the stream valley parks, one can envision the Native American people that lived here long before we did. The streams not only provided water, they also provided stone cobbles, which were made into stone tools. Streams also attracted animals that could be hunted for food, fur and hides.

STONE TOOLS

See a bit of broken quartz along the trail? These flakes of stone are the remains of the manufacture of stone tools. Sites located by the Cross County Trail represent Native American life dating back as far as 13,000 years ago, through contact with Europeans in the 17th century.

HISTORIC SITES

Many historic sites are also found along the trail. Large sites like Sully or Huntley Historic site contain a wealth of resources including the standing historic buildings, the cultural landscape and archaeological sites. Archaeological sites along the trail include the remains of slave quarters, tenant farmer dwellings, and industrial activities such as mills.

THE CIVIL WAR

Hundreds of American Civil War sites exist in the county. Railroads and turnpikes were critical for moving troops during the war, and the outer forts built to protect Washington were located along the boundary between Federally-occupied Alexandria and Fairfax County. Important military actions and battles were fought around Manassas/Bull Run, Ox Hill, and Dranesville. Major encampments occupied the county, especially around Centreville, and numerous armed engagements were fought to control transportation corridors, including roads and railroads. Campaigns directed at Richmond and Washington surged through Fairfax County, affecting nearly every part of the province.

Enjoy the Cross County Trail, But Don't Pocket the Past

It is illegal to remove ANY artifact from county parks, so don't pocket the past! When artifacts are removed, the secrets they might reveal are lost. If you think you have found an artifact or historic site, please let us know by calling 703-534-3881.

We value your participation in preserving Fairfax County's heritage.

Spear point, an artifact representing Fairfax County's Native American heritage.



Dear Alison *continued from page 1*

of the weasel family of which we have skunks, long-tailed weasels, mink and river otters. Skunks are by far the most commonly seen because they thrive in urban areas eating grubs, amphibians, small mammals, eggs and trash. Skunks don't see very well and aren't picky, and they tend to be less shy because of their odiferous protection. Long-tailed weasels are probably relatively abundant even in inner city areas but are VERY hard to find. Mink are rare, usually in Fairfax County on large streams and smaller drainages where there are fewer human activities. Otter are similar to mink in this way, although different in their habits.

Huntley Meadows Park has had otter for years due to the wetlands, streams and large relatively undisturbed bottomland forest. There, otters can be more readily observed because they have become a little more accustomed to humans and the boardwalk system takes you out into the wetlands where they are more likely to occur. They have been less visible at Huntley in the last several years

as the wetland has decreased due to siltation and changes in the activity of the beavers in the main wetland area.

Otters are also regularly seen along the Potomac River especially in marsh areas (Dyke Marsh south of Alexandria is a good place to look; Woodbridge Refuge might be another). The many paddlers in our area include a lot of natural history buffs who encounter otters out in the water or along the shore pretty regularly. Just about any larger stream, lake, large stream valley or even smaller streams with surrounding areas providing abundant food can play host to otter.

As for their numbers, I don't think anyone knows. If I had to guess, I would think that their numbers in Fairfax County may be several hundred, and they would be more abundant in rural areas or areas with cleaner water and more food.

There are no special efforts to protect otters in our area. The best thing we can do is preserve natural areas, especially those around water, and to improve water quality that

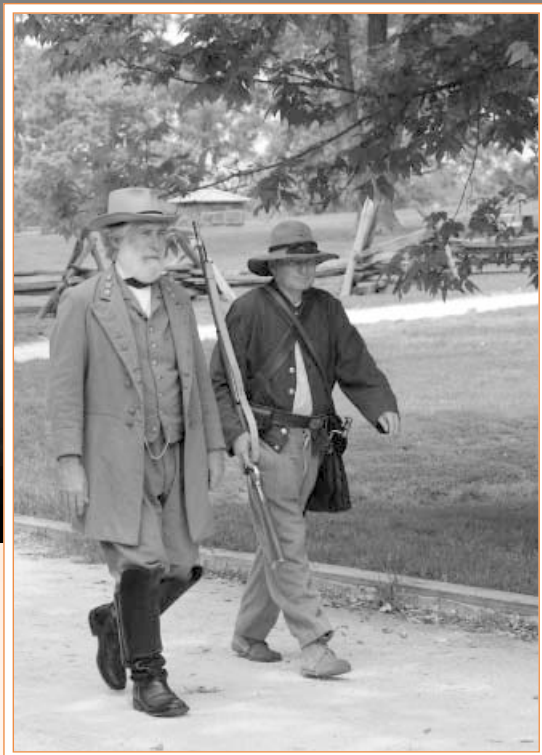
supports the fish, crayfish and amphibians that are their primary food source. The more room and the more food, the more otters there will be. Like any predator though, their numbers will never be extremely abundant, but there is definitely a lot of room for improvement to habitat that could support more otters.

As for moving them; you cannot. Otters are fairly adaptive, but are also very territorial. Virginia state law prohibits relocation except in special circumstances because animals that are moved are often killed by others of their own species if they invade their territory or otherwise die to the extreme stress of moving them. The local otters are adapted to the conditions in our county and are the best adapted of their kind to survive in those conditions.

I hope this is helpful.

Sincerely, Charles Smith
Naturalist, Natural Resource
Management and Protection
Fairfax County Park Authority
Fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/resources

Saturday and Sunday, August 19th and 20th, SULLY CIVIL WAR WEEKEND



When Maria Barlow opened the door of Sully early in the morning in December 1862, she found J.E.B. Stuart's cavalry encamped around the house. After cooking breakfast for the officers, she spent the next few days caring for Union wounded left behind by the Confederate troops. Hear about this and more as Sully Historic Site

hosts its annual **Civil War Weekend encampment on Saturday and Sunday, August 19th and 20th from 10am-4pm on Saturday and 10am-3pm on Sunday.** Reenactors demonstrate the varied work of the army, including skirmishes between Union and Confederate forces, and artillery and cavalry demonstrations. Visit the open-hearth kitchen and slave quarter to see costumed interpreters recreate the daily experiences of Northern Virginia residents during the early years of the Civil War. Watch and participate in period games and hear local duo Evergreen Shade perform period music on the lawn. The cost is \$6 for adults, \$4 for seniors and children. Included in this program is a guided tour of the first and second floors of the 1794 home of Richard Bland Lee, Northern Virginia's first congressman and uncle of Robert E. Lee.

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